

"Aq Notes"

A SUMMARY OF NEWS, EVENTS AND FACTS FROM USDA



President George W. Bush greets Secretary Veneman and Interior Secretary Gale Norton as they meet to discuss the Healthy Forest Initiative. 12/11

U.S., CHILE CONCLUDE FTA—

"Under this Free Trade Agreement, our access to Chile's market will improve for a variety of U.S. products, including durum wheat, pork, beef, feed grains and dairy, horticultural, and high-value food products. Over 75% of U.S. farm goods will enter Chile duty-free within four years. U.S. tariffs will be phased out over 12 years, but the FTA includes a provision that protects U.S. farmers and ranchers from sudden surges in imports. The FTA will give America's producers improved access to a market of 15 million consumers." *Secretary Veneman 12/11*

US Takes CWB to WTO--

The U.S. Trade Representative's Office filed a case against Canada's monopolistic Canadian Wheat Board, "highlighting our commitment to ensuring a fair and open market for U.S. wheat farmers," *Secretary Veneman, 12/17.*

Veneman, Norton Announce Additional Measures to Protect Forests

The Bush Administration last week announced additional actions to improve the health of the nation's forests by proposing regulatory changes that will expedite badly needed forest and rangeland restoration practices to reduce the risks of catastrophic wildfires.

The proposals are key to implementing the President's Healthy Forest Initiative announced in August 2002 on the heels of a wildfire season that burned over 7.1 million acres of public and private lands. They include: new thinning and forest restoration procedures; expediting the appeals process; protecting endangered species by accelerating the process that permits fuels reduction and simplifying the environmental assessment process.

After a briefing at the White House with President Bush, Secretary Veneman said, "The key to the President's healthy forests initiative is to focus on not what we take from the forests but how we leave the forests. Taken together, the improvements we're announcing will give managers the tools that they need to protect our national treasures. With these tools, we will leave future generations a legacy of healthy forests, safer communities and a quality environment." For more go to: www.usda.gov.

President Bush Creates Faith-Based and Community Initiatives Center at USDA

President Bush signed an Executive Order Dec. 12 creating a Faith-Based and Community Initiative Center within USDA. The USDA works in many capacities to provide programs, grants and other services that help build stronger communities through rural economic development and investment, food and nutrition programs, as well as food aid. This decision will provide USDA the opportunity to better coordinate delivery mechanisms and work more closely with faith-based community organizations.

Secretary Veneman, who traveled with the President to Philadelphia for the announcement applauded the decision saying, "Our objective is to provide these types of programs to help families and children, improve our neighborhoods and build stronger communities. Through the President's leadership, we will work with renewed commitment and vigor to achieve results."

2003 crop loan rates set for some crops—

USDA announced 2003 crop national and county loan rates for wheat, barley, oats, sunflowers, flaxseed, canola, rapeseed, safflower and mustard seed. This marks the earliest such an announcement has been made in recent history. In addition, the department made some adjustments in cross-border differences in county loan rates.

To access the loan rate for your county go to <http://www.fsa.usda.gov>.

Quotables...

"Technology is one of the most powerful tools we have to achieve the goals of increasing agricultural productivity, ending famine and improving nutrition. This conference will focus on the needs of developing countries in adopting new food and agricultural technologies." *Secretary Veneman, 12/6.*



Secretary Veneman chats with Dr. Norman Borlaug, after speaking to the International Food Policy and Research Institute. Borlaug is a Nobel Peace Prize winner. 12/6

"The energy bill contains a renewable fuel standard that would result in five billion gallons of ethanol and biodiesel consumption by the year 2012. That is a provision the administration supported and will continue to support next year."

Secretary Veneman to the Farm Journal Forum, Washington D.C. 12/4

EPA ANNOUNCES CAFO MEASURES

Secretary Veneman joined EPA Administrator Whitman in announcing a final rule to improve environmental quality. For more information go to www.usda.gov. 12/16

USDA Urges Farmers to Begin Early Farm Bill Sign-Up

Concerned about the slow pace of signup for major farm programs under the 2002 Farm Bill, top USDA officials are urging producers to begin the process quickly to ensure timely distribution of benefits and to avoid long lines and delays next year.

"We are hopeful that the extensive outreach, education and training USDA has conducted throughout the country will enable producers to quickly focus on signing up for programs," said Veneman.

Undersecretary JB Penn said, "If producers are putting forth a New Year's resolution, we hope it is to understand the importance of signing up early."

He added that late harvest in many parts of the country as well as the program changes in the law requiring more information from farmers are reasons for slow sign-up. USDA has developed new software, trained personnel, prepared new directives and conducted education seminars to help move the process forward. For more go to: www.usda.gov/farmbill.

Veneman Stresses Importance of Developing World in Trade Talks

In a speech to the International Food Policy and Research Institute, Secretary Veneman tied the success of the ongoing Doha Development round to cooperation between the developed and developing world.

"The World Trade Organization (WTO) will not survive if it is turned into a two-track system, with one set of rules and obligations for developed countries and another for developing countries and this is especially true in agriculture," she said. "Developing countries can, and should be given special and deferential treatment which takes into account adjustment challenges that they face, but they cannot be given wholesale exemptions from the trade obligations to which other countries commit."

During her remarks, the Secretary announced that USDA will host a ministerial conference on agricultural science and technology in June 2003 in Sacramento, California. The Conference will focus on the role science and technology can play in raising sustainable agricultural productivity in developing countries, with the goal of boosting food availability and improving nutrition.

The Census is Counting on You

The 2002 Census of Agriculture has begun with farmers and ranchers all across the country being mailed forms that will help provide a comprehensive portrait of agriculture throughout the nation. The Census, conducted every five years helps in farm program development and other farm, food and agriculture issues important to the farm sector.

"Input and participation from producers is critical," said Secretary Veneman, who announced various public outreach efforts being undertaken to increase participation.

Participation deadline is February 3, 2003. Data provided are held strictly confidential by law. Statistical results are aggregated and published only in geographical summaries to prevent identification of individual farms.

For drop-in ads for publications and additional information go to: www.usda.gov.

USDA IS AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER AND PROVIDER